Use Internet as public relations tool

E-BIZ

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Big business spends big money on public relations. The objective is to put a positive spin in the media on new products or services, controversial topics, key activities and continuing developments within the organization.

Working effectively with the media can be a powerful skill for small business. After all, if a newspaper runs a story about your new product or service, your profile will be raised without spending scarce advertising dollars. But few small businesses know how to help make it happen.

That's where the Internet comes in. Recent reports suggest many journalists use the Internet to some degree when researching a story or preparing a show. If you can grab their attention while they are doing research, you may get coverage.

Establish an on-line media centre on your Web site to provide information to visiting journalists — who you are, as well as your credentials, media experience and areas of expertise. Ensure that this area of your site is listed in appropriate places (such as on-line industry indexes or topic indexes).

Consider a listing in one of the many print directories that provide details about experts on various topics. Look at Sources, for example, a resource used by journalists across Canada (**www.sources.com**).

You may also want to learn how to effectively send a media release on-line. But it's a complicated and risky business strategy because if it isn't done right, you will likely damage your reputation rather than boost it. The last thing you want to do is write a release and distribute it to hundreds of journalists who have no interest in the topic — and find yourself facing their wrath instead of their interest.

Research news stories in on-line archives to see who is writing about or specializes in the topic that relates to your product or service. Those are the people to whom you may send your release.

Next, find out their E-mail address — you can scan through the Web site of the media organization for which they work. But there is a better way: get a copy of Anawave Websnake (**www.anawave.com**). Websnake will build a list of every E-mail address it finds on the Web site you identify.

After you compile a list of E-mail destinations for your release, carefully draft the material — and use the Internet to help you. At PRWeb, you can find material on how to create an effective media release (**www.prweb.com/coach/970722a.htm**). Look under the PR coach section for other useful tips. Keep your release short and to the point. Avoid fluff, and concentrate on the facts.

When you send a media release by E-mail, put at the top of the message an indication that if they don't want to receive such messages, you will remove them from your list. Understand that many journalists receive far too much E-mail from companies eager to promote their products, and may want nothing to do with you. Make sure they can opt out, and respect their wishes.

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